

Welcome to a special edition of the Friday column. Last night the City Council took action on the recently approved contract with the Police Benevolent Association, passing it with unanimous approval.

To say that the contract negotiations between the City and the PBA have taken a long time is a bit of an understatement. The contract expired on December 31, 2004, and since then it has certainly been interesting.

In the end, we reached a contract that is fair for both the City of Troy and the men and women that keep our streets safe. In the past year, we have negotiated deals with the PBA, the Uniformed Firefighters Association, and the CSEA. Each of these deals has resulted in the City of Troy achieving significant changes to the health care benefits in Troy.

Over the course of the last five years, health care costs in the City of Troy rose more than \$6 million. It took significant effort to level that number off, but this year, we will finally see some stabilization. That \$6 million increase accounts for nearly ten percent of the entire budget. Thanks to great work by Comptroller Deborah Witkowski on the financial end of the spectrum, and Deputy Mayor Dan Crawley, who has negotiated many aspects of these contracts, we are close to having these costs under control.

I have stated often that the City of Troy is in the best financial condition of the past 20 years, and the numbers back it up. Our bond rating has increased to levels that have not been seen since the 1980's, and there is genuine interest among developers that will build our tax base.

My major concern is that the City Council is blind to the progress that has been made in the past four years. Earlier this year I laid out the reasons why the City of Troy must pursue a revaluation, our first since 1972, an exceedingly long time, and a problem that could lead to our downfall. I asked them for cooperation, as we put the plan together that will allow us to recover from an ever-decreasing equalization rate.

The response last night was that they would not pursue it unless limitations were in place protecting a certain class of residents. This is illegal, and though the Council may be willing to break the law, I am not. We will present a reassessment plan that is legitimate, and benefits the City as a whole. I find it laughable that the City Council President said he was concerned about increasing taxes for a certain segment of people, and then immediately voted to approve the Library creating a special tax district to raise more than \$800,000, and forgive a \$6 million debt from a company that has been taking advantage of Troy for more than 20 years.

I hate that this column had a political tone today, but we are at a crossroads. I hope everyone can see that.

Have a great weekend.

Harry J Tutunjian
Mayor of Troy